

Milton and David Wees, Sarnia, Ont.

Interviewed by Wm. Wakeham and Richard Rathbun,

September 3, 1894.

Experiences
Seines
Trolls
Seines
History
Descrip.

5, a, g

They have been fishing here about 34 years. They began to fish with seines, and also troll lines, but did not do very much with them and have not for this last 15 years. They fished steadily with seines up to this spring. Their seines run from 75 to 80 rods long. In the center they would fish 20 feet of water. In the wings they had 5-inch mesh and in the bunt 2 1/2-inch.

Season

We commence seining in the spring about May 15, and in the fall about September 15. In olden times we used to commence about April 15. That spring seining lasts until about the first of July, so that the spring season would be from May 15 to July 1. Then

Seines

we begin again about September 15 or 20 and continue until cold weather comes on, until in November sometime.

Catch
walleye
sturgeon
herring

In the spring fishery we take pickerel, sturgeon and some herring, but not very many herring in the spring. Once in awhile we

do
decide
cause

would get an odd whitefish, ^{in the winter} and used to get more a few years ago. I think we only got 2 this spring. In Detroit River they have been trapping them and I think it cut them off so that they did not come up here. When

they began pound fishing in Lake Erie our whitefish dropped off. In the seines we

Suckers
perch
cat
bullheads
sheepshead

would get suckers, perch and a few catfish, also a few bullheads, but not many. Would also get a few sheepsheads. Never got any

G. Carp
bass
w. bass
trout

German carp. It was a very rare thing to get black bass here. We used to get the white bass, but not many of late years. We used to get quite a few trout also. We do

Seines

not get many trout now, but until this season we have always got a few. The pound nets do not seem to take trout like our seines would. This is a pickerel and sturgeon ground, but I do not think our books will show 500 pounds of pickerel caught this year, but, of course, we began a little late.

walleye
Sturgeon

mesh

We think, however, that the big 8-inch mesh in our leads lets the pickerel through. In the summer we always knocked off fishing.

herring

veg.
movements

In the fall our principal fishery was herring. Our reason for thinking whitefish

mf

come from Lake Erie was because before they put their nets in there we used to get them; that is, about 14 years ago. We used to get quite a fair catch of whitefish in those days. We got the most whitefish in the spring then. Up at Grand Bend they always got more whitefish than we got. Our principal fishery here was always sturgeon and

in the seines

Series
after

Sturgeon

coalleye
herring

pickerel, and herring in the fall.

7. Documents

Herring

We think the herring work in from the lake, and we think they are Lake Huron herring. The herring we catch in the spring are larger than the ones we get in the fall. In the fall they are not so very large. When we first start fishing along the last of September they begin to catch them down by Port Lampton; then they begin to catch them right along up. They get the herring down there before we get them here, which shows they come up the river. They get them 2 weeks before we get them here. But this last 5 years we have not caught 100 barrels of herring altogether in the fall. We have gotten more this spring than we got all last fall.

Season

Seines
O.P.
Small fish
mesh

a gun

We do not catch any more small fish in the seines than we do in the pound nets. Of course, the pot in the pound is the same size as the center in the seine. The pot is

2 1/2-inch. I think if it was 2-inch it would be better for the fish, as they would not gill so bad. We never caught any quantity of small fish. The smallest pickerel we used to get would weigh a little under a pound. That is, yellow pickerel. That is what we call No.2 pickerel. The No.1's would go 1 pound and over. Anything under 1 pound was No.2. The No.2 should be all cast out and let them go. They could be thrown out all right, as they are a very hardy fish.

gilling

*challenge
size
grades*

*Throw out
small*

*Sturgeon
size*

The sturgeon used to run just the same as they do now. This spring we caught about the largest sturgeon we ever caught. Some of them would go up to 150 pounds round, and from that down to 25 pounds. If they are not 4 feet you do not get full price for them, but still they were sent to market, and counted as 1/2 a fish. Our sturgeon were sent to Port Huron. They save the cavi-

*market
caviar*

Sturgeon

names

are there, and we sent our sturgeon over there round, daily, and we do that still. There is what we call the black sturgeon and rock sturgeon. The black sturgeon are big and the rock sturgeon small. I think probably the rock sturgeon are the young of the black sturgeon. I think the rough skin

former value
let them go

leaves them when they get larger. When we began fishing we could not give the sturgeon away and did not save them at all. We used to draw them in on shore in the seines and let them go right out again, and probably would catch them the next time we hauled.

begin selling

It is about 16 or 17 years ago that we begun to sell them. The first we got was about 10 cents apiece for them, and then we go 20 cents and so on up.

increase
cause
P.

We never noticed any diminution in the sturgeon until they went to putting so many pound nets up in the lake here. They had

sturgeon

P.
calish

movements

P.
history.
walleye
decrease

movements

Spawning

the pound nets on the Canada side up around Blue Point and Kettle Point. They have brought down at one time over 7,300 sturgeon, and all for Selkirk. The sturgeon seem to come down from up above. It is about 10 years ago since they went to putting pound nets up there, and then we noticed the sturgeon and pickerel both began to decrease.

We think the pickerel are traveling down in the spring when we catch them. Some of them have spawned and some have not. It is just owing to the spring; if the ice leaves early, they seem to spawn early. In the early days about all the pickerel had the spawn in when we began fishing April 15. The pickerel spawn I think up in these bays where there is quite quiet water. It would not be in a swift current. I mean the small bays in Lake Huron and possibly in the river below here. I think in the early spring

they are on their way down to spawn. When they are coming back after spawning we never get many in the seines, as they seem to keep out further. This spring the pickerel seemed to be all spawned out by May 15 when we began fishing.

*Sturgeon
spawning*

The sturgeon seem to have spawn in them most any time. We have taken sturgeon that had spawned. That would be along about the last of May and June. I do not know where they spawn unless it is up around the bays in the lake. There is a bay around Kettle Point where the Indians used to spear them and I always thought, as they come so close in shore, in about 8 or 10 feet of water, that they come in to spawn. An Indian said he had seen them lying up there just as thick as you could spread your fingers out. That would be in June and July. And then we have seen sturgeon in the fall with the

Spawning

abundant

spawn so ripe that they could not hold it through the winter.

Lake
Seine
No.
Loc.
No. men
bottom
cleaning

From the mouth of the river up there used to be 7 seines fished. It took about 8 men to a seine. They were all hired men. We had to clear the bottom before we began seining and had to employ divers. We have to clear the ground every year more or less, as there is always drift coming in. Some years we will pay a diver \$40 or \$50. We are always put to a good deal of expense keeping our grounds clear.

Lake
Current

The current is towards the river and the rate would be about 3 miles an hour off here and it increases as you go down. I never noticed any difference in the current in the different seasons. It seems to be as rapid in the fall as in the spring. Before a blow there will be a rapid current. We always seine with the current and sometimes it

Seine
method

would go down very fast, so that we could hardly keep up with it, and other times it would go down slow. The current seems to set right straight for the river and in here it is right along shore. I notice the current out as far as we have been. I think the farther you get out the more current there will be.

Lake depth from shore
Seine distance out
The water increases gradually in depth as you go off shore. In a mile off shore would not have over 22 feet of water. We would go out about 100 rods with the seines and that was the general average distance.

Herring movements
Seines
Grounds below us, when the herring were coming up in the fall, would catch more than we would, and take it along later in the fall they seem to work in out of the lake and we would hold our own, but they would be small herring. We always thought the first run of larger herring came up the river, as

they always got them below a few days before we did.

Sturgeon
Season

We get our best run of sturgeon generally during the full moon in June. They would slack off in July and they would not come on again to amount to anything. We do not count on sturgeon after they once slack off.

Seine
Loc
Lake

From the mouth of the river to the upper limit of the seining was about 8 miles. There were 8 seining grounds in that distance and we were all about the same distance apart, except that up above they were a little farther apart and down in the bay they would be a little nearer.

Catch
ling
Sheepshead
menominee
long jaw
herring
wolf
size

We get a few ling and a very few sheeps-head. We did not get any menominees and no long jaw. Only got the ordinary herring and ordinary whitefish. Our whitefish would run from 2 1/2 pounds up to 10 pounds, and would average about 3 pounds. We have got a few

whitefish under a pound, but not many. We never notice any very small ones. The small fish we never draw in with the seine. I have seen young herring swimming along the beach here in July; at least I am pretty sure they were herring. We only got 1 or 2 whitefish here this spring and we lay it entirely to the nets in Lake Erie.

The seines that were fished in the river were a smaller seine than ours and they had a very small mesh so that they caught very small pickerel. It was mostly all No.2 fish they caught. A year ago this last spring we had a good run of pickerel, as good as we ever had, and finer pickerel I never saw. It was the best run we had for a number of years. But on the whole the pickerel have decreased very much since we began fishing. I think they have decreased easily one-half from what they were 20 years ago.

fish mesh

young herring

W.V. abundance

*Seine River
descrip.*

walleye mesh

decrease

Blue pike
● *Esoo maskinonge*
Brook trout
Eels

I do not think we ever got any blue pick-
erel here. Once in awhile we get a pike.
We take a few maskinonge, but they are very
scarce and always were. We took one a week
ago weighing 21 pounds dressed. I never saw
any brook trout here. We have caught 3 eels
here.

W. decrease
Seam

The whitefish have decreased down to noth-
ing. 25 years ago we used to get very nice
hauls. We used to get them mostly in the
spring, in May and the first of June. We
used to get a few in the fall, but no great
quantity. Trout have decreased nearly as
much as whitefish. We used to get a good
many trout 25 years ago.

Trout decrease
Seine history
Cause no decrease

In the early days there was no other fish-
ing here but seine fishing, and they used to
seine on the American side just the same as
we did here and we never could see any dif-
ference in the fishing until they put in the

*P.
q.
Causes
decrease*

q.

Wallace)

Season

w.f.

*Seines chief
fishery*

pound nets and gill nets. And when they put them up above here, double headers, and they had such large lifts, it certainly decreased our fishing here. We never fished any gill nets here at all. There has been others fishing them around us here on the sly and they get a good many pickerel. They put them in just as soon as the ice is out. The pickerel are here just as soon as the ice is out. Gill nets are fished here some for whitefish, from Port Huron. We never fished gill nets for whitefish or trout. All the people who own seines here confine themselves to seines entirely.

*P.
1st year
season*

descrip.

This is our first season for pound net fishing. We got one net out May 15, but a big blow came on and tore our nets up so we had to take them out and fix them up, and it was about the first of June before we commenced fishing. We fish an 8-inch lead.

The tunnel is 5, heart 6 and the pot 2 1/2-inch mesh.

In the pound nets this spring we have caught principally sturgeon and herring, and a few pickerel. We could catch the pickerel with the seines and I think the reason we did not get them in the pots was on account of the big lead. We also got a few sheepshead, mullets, and 2 cat-fish. Did not get any suckers or black bass, but got a few white bass. Did not get any pike, but got 2 maskinonge.

We have been bothered a good deal with the fish gilling in the pot. They were all herring. They would get their head in so that they would drown and then would puff up so that we would have to throw them away. There was quite a good deal of it and I presume it was on account of the sturgeon being in there. I think we have made some lifts

P.
Cath.

Sturgeon
herring
walleye

(Seines)
leading of
walleye

Sheepshead
mullet

Cat
sucker
bass
white bass

Eels
maskinonge

gilling

in our two nets and probably we would throw away sometimes nearly a bushel. I should say from 75 to 80 herring. We would have to throw them away. We would throw them right in the water and the current would carry them away. We put all the offal back on the land. But we threw over the fish that were gilled this season because they all threw them in the water. The small pickerel would gill in the net also, but not many of them, as we did not get many pickerel. A middling good sized herring would go through that mesh.

The herring we got this spring, I think 100 of them would weigh 100 pounds. Fall herring would not weigh only about half as much. The first run of the fall herring are a good sized herring, but I never noticed them as big as they were this spring. Those herring we got in the spring were very fat.

*Herring
market-*

*Season
abundance*

*Scarcity
cause*

*T.
season*

*Herring
decrease*

We ship them fresh mostly. Peddlers take them, that is all. We would supply a peddler twice a week. We would take 600 or 700 at a time out of 2 pounds. In the fall they used to be in large quantities, but we have had poor herring fishing in the fall for the last 5 or 6 years. We lay the scarcity of herring to the nets down in Lake Erie cutting them off. I think that we will get a good run of herring this fall, however, judging from what we have seen.

We will keep our nets out of the water until about September 20. We will simply wash the net and dry it, but may tar the pot. We tar our nets ourselves.

For the last 5 or 6 years we have had poor herring fishing right along. There has been no bad weather or anything of that sort to cause the decrease, and the other herring fisheries are about the same as ours. At *F. gen*

*up
trout
abundance*

*Seine
preferred*

*P.
injury by
boats & logs.*

mill refuse

bark

*boats have
caused
● Damage*

*P.
Seine
cost
life*

Kincardine I think they get more whitefish and trout than we do here.

We would prefer the seine to any other, kind of fishing, and another thing, our pound nets get destroyed by the boats and rafts so much.

a.g.m.

There has never been any pollution here from sawdust. There used to be any amount of mills and they threw all their stuff in the water, but it did not seem to make any difference with our fishing. We have never been bothered with bark to amount to anything. There is so much current here it would take it right down the river. But we get the bark in the pound nets, and there is some in them now. We have had no damage to our nets to speak of, except what has been caused by the boats.

P.

A pound net, set in the water complete, would be worth about \$500. A seining outfit

a.g.m.

would be about \$300. The wings of a seine would last about 5 years and the center about 2 years.

Fish movements

Sturgeon movements

The fish are going down generally when we catch them, I think, but the sturgeon seem to be working in. In the fore part of the season our upper net does the best and in the latter part the lower one seems to do the best. Our lead is about 75 rods and we run out to 21 feet of water. When fishing with seines we would make from 4 to 6 hauls a day. In the spring we would haul for pickerel and sturgeon. We have hauled in 60 baskets of herring in one haul in October.

P. descrip

*Seines,
No. hauls a day*

walleye

Sturgeon

herring

spawn

about

herring

spawn

I have cleaned herring in the spring when the spawn would be real soft, and in the fall I have cleaned them when they were the same way. I think herring spawn pretty late generally. I think whitefish spawn quite late in the fall also. Our bottom is sandy

*10/1
spawning*

and gravelly, but there is such a current that the whitefish could not spawn here. At Blue Point the bottom is rocky and would be a good spawning ground.

*Hatch's
w.f.
valleys*

They planted lots of both whitefish and pickerel here. There used to be men here in the spring getting the spawn. Parker used to come up here every spring from Sandwich. They would plant the young whitefish right out here in the lake. I have seen little minnows about an inch long working right up against a strong current. *F. J. J.*

*Seines
P.
Q.
destructive
Compared.*

If the Government would make away with all the pound nets and gill nets and let them go on and seine wherever they could, and in places where they could not seine let them have the places for spawning grounds. *agen*

If there were nothing but seines used in the lake, it would not be over 5 years before the fish would be back as abundant as they

ever were. We have destroyed more small fish with our 2 pounds this year than we would in 3 years with the seines.

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